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ABSTRACT

Prevention, in the form of consultation with campus agencies, is perceived as an alternative to crisis intervention. The goals of such consultation are to create a healthier, more supportive, growth-producing environment in which individuals can receive help before their life problems become serious enough to warrant professional therapy. This paper briefly describes an on-going collaborative consultative relationship that assists helping professionals in developing a campus-wide training program for University employees. The program involves staff members of the Student Counseling Center, in consultation with the campus Personnel Office, in helping supervisors in various departments to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Entry, assessment, implementation, and evaluation phases of the consultation process are described. (NRB)

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CONSULTATION WITH CAMPUS AGENCIES: A PREVENTATIVE COUNSELING SERVICE

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Collaborative Consultation Project *

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Introduction

Prevention is a concept that is accepted by virtually all professionals in the field, but is one that is often followed with some version of the statement "if only we had time." Unfortunately, too much professional counseling is devoted to meeting crisis situations or dead lines. We often deal with individuals after the system and their own problems have mounted in an interactive process resulting in a crisis situation. An alternative to crisis intervention is prevention in the form of consultation with campus agencies.

Caplan (1970) and Meade and Hamilton (1979) argue that mental health (and by extension, student services) professionals ought to be more widely engaged in "prevention" rather than "cure"; one way to achieve that goal is to intervene in the environment, making it a more healthy, supportive, and growth-producing atmosphere so that individuals could receive help from one another before their life problems become serious enough to warrant the attention of a professional therapist.

One of the main purposes of consultation is to help other professionals become more efficient and effective. By providing interdisciplinary support to agencies, consultants can be instrumental in developing climates where students will receive better services. Consultation, which fosters interventions in both the human and environmental dimensions, has potential to be a primary strategy in the developmental services of counselors and/or therapists.

This discussion presents an example of a successful consultative relationship that is presently in progress with a campus agency at Illinois State University. It will present the process of a collaborative consultative relationship that is assisting the consultee in developing a campus-wide training program for employees of the University.

Project

For the past two and a half years, staff members of the Student Counseling Center at Illinois State University have been involved in an extensive collaborative consultation with the campus Personnel Office. Consultation was sought to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of employees who are supervisors or managers in departments or units. These supervisors work in many areas of the campus, including: food service, physical plant, clerical pools, academic departments, and the library, as well as others. During the last eighteen months, the consultative relationship has involved weekly meeting to assist that office in developing a supervisory training program.

In keeping with Kurpius and Robinson's (1978) definition of the consultant role, the agency consultants serves as collaborators who formed egalitarian relationships with the consultees to bring about change. In this collegial relationship, there was a joint diagnosis with emphasis on the consultees finding their own solutions to their problems. The consultants serves as catalysts or facilitators for the problem solving process by assisting the consultees in defining goals and resources, and developing strategies and training techniques.

Several phases suggested by Kurpius (1978) were involved in the problem-solving process of this consultation. These include: a) entry phase - building a working relationship, b) assessment phase - data gathering and problem identification, and c) implementation phase - action. The final phase, evaluation, will be discussed with reference to how it

is incorporated into the program which is currently being implemented.

Entry

For three months, two agency team consultants worked with the consultee in the entry phase. The time was spent developing a working relationship by first clarifying the goals of the consultation. A discussion followed concerning the consultee's attitudes about the agency's goals for the client system (the unit supervisors). Although much time was spent discussing the limits of consultants' time commitments and defined role during this phase, this was a recurring issue throughout the project, and negotiations related to the roles of consultant and consultee were on-going. The final element of the entry phase was that of developing a written contract which reflected the previous negotiations. The contract served as a major tool for the consultant to define and redefine the nature of the consultation relationship. Roles, expectations, strategies, and overall goals were defined. As Blake and Mouton (1976) suggest the contract "specified the character of the relationship" and "helped the consultant and client crystallize expectations for what the relationship is to be." (p. 449). Additionally, the contract served as an educational tool that assisted the consultee in understanding modes of intervention not usually in the consultee's realm of experience.

Assessment

Once the contract was written, we moved into the assessment phase of consultation. This phase spanned approximately seven months. It involved gathering data and identifying problems associated with the project. In order to better understand the problems and concerns of unit supervisors, several meetings with supervisors from various

departments and units on campus were held. Within these meetings, specific common problems were identified. The primary concern was communicating with employees in several capacities - interviewing, daily requests, and supervision, and evaluation and feedback.

Once the theme of communication skills was identified, in collaboration with the consultee, the consultants began gathering information related to supervisory training programs. We visited another campus which maintains short-term, on going-training programs. We reviewed established management training programs while familiarizing ourselves with short-term supervisory programs previously presented on our campus. During the assessment phase, the consultants continued to define expectations and clarify their roles.

Implementation

For the past five months this project has been in the implementation phase. After exploring possible solutions, together, the consultants and the consultee formulated specific objectives, designed a plan of action, and developed an intervention. This intervention involved two components. A nine session supervisory training program was designed. At the same time, a training program was begun for leaders who will present the components of the program to all department or unit supervisors on campus. One consultant facilitated or coordinated the development of a supervisory training program manual for the training team. The second instructed a training team of staff members from the consultee's agency. This team developed the necessary skills to implement the plan of action or the supervisory training program.

The plan for this extensive program is to begin presenting it to campus supervisors this Spring. Over a three year period, every supervisor on campus will be exposed to the program.

Evaluation

The final phase - evaluation - is of primary importance. Evaluation procedures are incorporated into the program in two primary ways. A pre- and post program communication skill inventory will be administered to participants. Additionally, after each session the participants will evaluate its usefulness to them in their respective situations. These evaluations will be used in several ways, i.e., to gather data following the action plan, to rediagnose and replan, if necessary, to help develop a maintenance system to deal with future problesm, and to determine the effectiveness of the consultation.

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